



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement for the Closing Session of the SHDM on Internally Displaced Persons

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Paul W. Jones
Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on IDPs, Closing Session
Vienna, November 5, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States thanks the Bulgarian Chairmanship and ODIHR for organizing this important Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Internally Displaced Persons. The U.S. Delegation has listened and participated with interest and has benefited from the exchanges during this meeting. We appreciate the constructive contributions of all participants.

The fate of internally displaced persons is one of the most pressing humanitarian concerns facing the OSCE region. Its consequences are severe, not only for the individuals concerned, but also for those states who face daily challenges because they have a significant number of IDPs on their territory.

The United States feels strongly that OSCE participating States should take several practical steps to respond more constructively and effectively to the needs of IDPs.

First, we recommend that all OSCE participating States adopt national laws and policies on internal displacement. These should be consistent with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and with OSCE commitments.

The United States upholds the fundamental principle that participating States should protect individuals against forcible returns to unsafe and insecure areas. Therefore, we would support the adoption of a new OSCE commitment, based on principle 15(d) of the Guiding Principles, and affirming the right of IDPs to be protected against forcible return or resettlement.

While voluntary return of IDPs and their resettlement and reintegration are generally recognized goals, this process cannot take place in unsafe or insecure environments.

We recognize that Roma IDPs in the Balkans face particular challenges. This is because many Roma in the region have faced repeated displacement and specific difficulties in integrating into their new areas of residence. Often, the voluntary return of Roma IDPs is impossible because their old neighborhoods remain unsafe, or because their ownership documents were destroyed in the very events that forced them to leave their old homes.

The United States urges participating States to assist IDPs, regardless of their ethnic background, with the return of their property or occupancy rights. If restitution is not possible because the property has been destroyed, then IDPs must be offered appropriate compensation.

Our exchanges over the past two days have also revealed several broad areas of consensus.

First, there has been agreement that participating States should formally recognize freedom of movement and the freedom of IDPs to choose their residence. States must fully ensure the civil and political rights of IDPs, including the right to vote, as well as access to education and employment.

Today's discussions have also revealed agreement that a variety of regional actors should be involved in responding to displacement. Participating States should engage a wide network of actors in their planning and implementation of policies for voluntary return, resettlement, and reintegration. This network should include international and non-governmental organizations, as well as local civil society groups.

Internally displaced persons should be equally engaged – and not left out of – this process. Authorities should minimize the bureaucratic obstacles that hinder inter-NGO communication, and they should remove unwieldy administrative requirements.

Finally, the United States believes it is necessary to strengthen the ability of the Secretariat, the ODIHR, and the OSCE field missions, to monitor and protect the fundamental rights of IDPs. The U.S. would support the creation by ODIHR of a handbook on best practices for property return mechanisms. We can draw on the wealth of experiences by OSCE Missions in the Balkans, as well as those of other international organizations, such as the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, for this project.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.